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Library Science

THE
LIBRARY ASSISTANT

**The Official Journal
of the Association of
Assistant Librarians**

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THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE
ASSOCIATION OF ASSISTANT LIBRARIANS
(Section of the Library Association)

HON. EDITOR: W. B. STEVENSON

Hornsey Public Libraries

Announcements

REGISTRATION FOR MILITARY SERVICE

MEMBERS of public library staffs are reminded that the correct description as shown in the Schedule of Reserved Occupations is given on page 21 thereof as:

LOCAL AUTHORITIES STAFF.

Executive and clerical grades not otherwise specifically reserved at a lower age by reason of their occupation . . . 25.

If any public librarian or public library assistant over the age of 25 is in any doubt as to whether he has been correctly described in his registration papers or if he is notified to attend for medical examination he should write immediately with full particulars to the Secretary of the Library Association.

❦

Librarians and Learning

R. L. W. Collison

MOST people have frequent reason to complain that a shop assistant, a business firm, or an official has failed to understand their needs, and that in consequence orders have been wrongly executed, goods have failed to be delivered, or a customer has not succeeded in obtaining a commodity which was in fact readily available. In the hands of a skilful raconteur, and embellished with those sly highlights which seem as if they should have happened even if actually they did not, such a story can have unfortunate effects on the reputation of the soundest of businesses, for the public as a whole will sacrifice excuses if they should threaten to spoil a good story, and will ignore past good records in favour of present mistakes with that subconsciously malicious wit which is sometimes disconcertingly paralleled in the actions of small children. Nor is allowance made very often for the possibility that the

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client may have failed to make himself clearly understood, or for his degree of imperfection in the use of the English language. Nor does the public take care to distinguish between the assistant who deals with their requirements and the firm he represents: to the public he *is* the firm. And what has been said about the relations of business firms and the public applies equally well to the attitude of the general public to libraries.

Of course, the public is by no means always wrong, and it is the constant concern of all employers to ensure that those employees who deal with the public should be of sufficiently sympathetic temperament to avoid the more obvious clashes which occur from time to time. In fact commerce would appear to have achieved this aim more swiftly than local and central government, for, where profits are concerned, every effort is taken to ensure the best results, whereas it is only recently that, for instance, post offices have lived down the notoriety of the proverbially "rude girl" in sub-post-offices. But in spite of all these precautions it may be said that it is only in a minority of cases that the assistant is in complete *rapproch* with the particular member of the public whose needs he happens to be serving. In shops and in many businesses this is of no great importance, for a loaf of bread or a ton of coke may be sold without great need of consideration for intellectual nuances. But when the commodities to be sold are of a vaguer or more specialized type, or where their value is not easily assessable, the assistant becomes correspondingly more unable to effect a sale, and the transaction considerably more difficult. For instance, both jeweller and bookseller find greater difficulty in satisfying their clients than a confectioner ever experiences. This difficulty is to be found to an even greater extent in dealing with the readers in public libraries, and the root of the matter seems to lie in the inability of the assistant to meet the reader on his own intellectual level, and his lack of skill in adjusting himself rapidly to people of greatly varying needs. In some cases it would appear as though the assistant were suffering from some form of mental inertia which prevents him from appreciating the requirements of the reader, but in most cases it is due to a lack of knowledge (both intellectual and social) which would enable him to put at the disposal of the reader the resources of the library. In addition, the liability of error or a want of clarity on the part of the reader in stating his needs may increase the confusion: a confusion which in many cases can be counteracted by an assistant who is quick to perceive the possibility of distortion.

Lest at this point it should be decided that this confusion relates only to a few rare cases in each system, let it be considered how few users of any reference library clearly state what they need in a few words: how many hours are wasted because readers demand some special book instead

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of announcing what information they require—information which may be available in a dozen different books; moreover, in how many cases an assistant has only been able to think where the information wanted could be obtained, long after the disappointed reader has left the library.

These psychological difficulties cannot be eliminated merely by the substitution of slick hair, dapper clothes, and a general atmosphere of alertness for the long hair and untidiness with which library assistants have been satirized at the present time. American business methods and mechanical equipment cannot achieve for the library what they have done for the soda fountain, and alertness is only one of the first essentials in a long list of desirable qualities in a library assistant.

The general reputation of librarians during recent years could never be described by the word "learned." Like schoolmasters, public librarians are recognized as public servants, but it is doubtful whether the public ever regards either profession as having the same claim to learning as, for instance, a museum curator or a university lecturer. If such a subject is considered at all it is probably dismissed with the comment that teacher and librarian are alike stuffed with useless knowledge. The lack of mention of librarians in the general press or books in this country fails to give much tangible support to these impressions, but in America the librarian (usually a woman) seems to have been put in the same class as the teacher with the same description of plain, bespectacled, frumpish, and pedantic.

To escape such a fate there has been an increasing tendency since the Great War to smarten public libraries, to give them an air of efficiency and capability, to which has been added an increasing awareness of the values of subtle or blatant publicity. In addition, the necessity for technical knowledge among assistants has been recognized to the full, but there has been no similar urge towards the acquirement of general knowledge. As a single example of this, consider the position of graduates in public libraries to-day: a glance at the current number of the *Library Association yearbook* reveals that the majority of them hold subordinate positions, and moreover that the overwhelming majority of chief librarians have no degree. In saying this it is by no means intended to exaggerate the virtues of possession of a degree, or to belittle the achievements of librarianship; but it must be admitted that such a position is somewhat curious and is an interesting sidelight on the attitude of both librarians and town and county councils to-day.

The enhancement of the value of technical knowledge, rather than general knowledge, to the assistant finds a ready example in the comparison of the rewards of a degree and of a diploma. An assistant possessing the Elementary and Intermediate examinations of the Library

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Association stands far more chance of being appointed to a senior position than an assistant of equal experience with a degree but without professional qualifications. This superiority of technical over university qualifications in the eyes of both librarian and committee continues throughout the early years of an assistant's career, and his being thus encouraged to complete his professional diploma before studying for a degree means that even with the best intentions he probably never commences on that more arduous work.

Professional education has itself reached a stage where it may be regarded as overwhelming. Correspondence courses have developed to such an extent that the work they prescribe leaves the student little leisure time; the same may be said of polytechnic classes and revision schools, and the Library Association has built up a syllabus which ensures that the majority of assistants spend at least four or five years in qualifying for their diploma. Professional periodicals are numerous and the social obligation to read them and to attend professional meetings is stronger every year. While, from the point of view of technical knowledge *only*, the results are very desirable, the effect on the outlook of the assistant cannot at any time be described as the most desirable. Four or five years' intensive study of the technical side of librarianship is inclined to make the student for a lifetime conscious of and intent on those minutiae which are the bane of so many libraries. In addition, it does not help to make him aware of general trends in public interest or of the world beyond libraries. In these days it is regarded as a virtue that the earnest student should refuse to go to some comparatively innocent pleasure on the grounds of his having to study: witness the recent amusing ". . . Gone to L.C.C. Classes" poster campaign in the London Underground. Moreover, there is no disinterested pursuit of knowledge in such abstention from recreation: rather is it a desire to "get on"—or, rather, to get out of the present impoverished position—which is behind most of these efforts.

Knowledge of books and their contents is firmly subordinated to methods of handling and caring for them: so much so that it is possible for an assistant to qualify for his diploma and yet to have but an uneasy acquaintance with literature and an unfamiliar knowledge of standard books in other subjects. In these days when the majority of public library readers are more interested in any subject than literature, it is futile to bewail the low standard of literary knowledge, but the lack of acquaintance with the standard books in scientific and technical, historical and sociological subjects is more serious. Few librarians can read through Miss Graham's *American Bookman's manual* without feeling a deep sense of their inability to call themselves bookmen in the full sense of

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the word. Again, many booksellers in this country, untrammelled by the host of technical subjects which librarians have to master, have a better working knowledge of books than most librarians can muster. (Sonnenschein, the compiler of the monumental *Best books*, was a bookseller.)

It is clear that few assistants are in the happy position of being able to meet on equal ground those readers who have more than a beginner's acquaintance with their own subject. Nor is this necessarily desirable, but on the other hand no assistant should be unable to satisfy the requirements of such a reader owing to his lack of knowledge of the language or of the best books of that subject. To give a good library service it is necessary that each assistant who comes into contact with the public should be fairly well acquainted with the standard works on all subjects for which enquiries are likely to be made. In this connection Mr. Savage's idea of specialized assistants for each group of subjects would go a long way to solving the difficulty of training large numbers of assistants with encyclopædic minds. An assistant, however, who has a definite hobby—such as music—to which he devotes most of his spare time, is usually ill-fitted to cope with enquiries on other subjects, for the alertness with which he meets a query concerning music is likely to be noticeably lacking when the enquiry does not deal with his hobby.

It is a source of great interest to speculate on the fate of readers' enquiries in the hands of different assistants. A query put to the right assistant may institute an exhaustive research resulting in valuable aid to the reader: the same enquiry made to a different assistant with no knowledge of the subject, or with little enthusiasm for library work, may be blocked straight away by the apparent lack of interest on the part of the assistant. In connection with this the attitude of the librarian-in-charge or of the chief librarian is often reflected, for consciously or subconsciously the librarian may discourage certain types of enquiries which may not appeal to him or which he believes may prove troublesome. This unequal service from different libraries, often in neighbouring boroughs, is a cause of much of the disparagement of the public library service as a whole, and a great amount of good might come from a more uniform policy on the part of public libraries, backed by a nation-wide assurance from the Library Association that suggestions are everywhere welcomed and met as far as possible.

The training, conditions of service, and professional education in public libraries do not combine to give every assistant that breadth of mind and knowledge which is required in all types of library to-day. Nor are there definite signs that in the future any considerable move will be made. During the war it is unlikely that the Library Association will

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make any change in the syllabus of the examinations, and the longer war continues the further is the profession from creating a new method of training.

A preliminary step to any such method would be the improvement of most salary scales for junior assistants. At the moment in the greater number of libraries the scales are so poor that it is to be wondered that the worst kind of assistant is not to be found everywhere. Undoubtedly the more attractive salaries of other professions rob librarianship of many a boy or girl of great promise. With the increase of salaries should be coupled some amelioration of hours of employment: when there is such a large number of unemployed there is little excuse for the long hours which students work.

There is little material in the Library Association's syllabus which cannot be covered in the course of the day's work in the library: (1) by the proper organization of the library itself—witness the large percentage of passes among the staffs of such libraries as Birmingham; (2) by the frequent exchange of assistants between departments, a method usually avoided because it makes the organization of staff routine more difficult; (3) by the organized pooling of staff textbooks—at the moment some libraries have a wealth of material available and few staff who require it, while at others the staff must make do with a poor stock and out-of-date editions. In this way it should not be necessary for the assistant to spend most of his leisure time for five years or so in the study of librarianship, and the present requirements of the Library Association would be covered.

To improve the general knowledge of books the Library Association and the A.A.L. could make a concerted effort to keep librarians posted with the production of standard works and new editions on all familiar subjects. Mr. Headicar is already performing this service, in the Library Association Record, for Government publications: an incorporation of this item in a supplement of the Library Association Record, devoted to the valuation of books and supervised by a permanent Committee of expert librarians, would be an inestimable service. The present examination in English Literature could be superseded by an examination on book stock somewhat on the lines of the (abandoned) Library Stock and Assistance to Readers examination of the Library Association.

Far more important than this, however, should be the widespread understanding in the profession that general knowledge and acquaintance with books are more desirable than skill in classification and cataloguing. If these methods were adopted it might well be that libraries had gone one step further towards meeting the requirements of their readers. A large book fund and a large membership are of little value unless the

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best books are bought with the one and brought to the notice of the greatest number of the other.



An Experiment in Cataloguing

F. Higenbottam

WHEN taking over at Canterbury early last year, we were faced with the problem of getting a public catalogue ready as quickly as possible. We possessed an author catalogue in duplicate—one in manuscript, the other typed, and it was decided after some consideration to compile a dictionary catalogue.

I decided to experiment with Library of Congress printed cards and wrote to the Library Association asking their advice. The Secretary recommended a visit to the Bureau of American Bibliography and added that according to his records, there was no public library in Great Britain at that time (March 1939) using L.C. cards. We then wrote to the National Central Library, and the Librarian very kindly offered to check a list of our additions with the depository set of over a million and a half L.C. cards in the Bureau of American Bibliography. We sent up 840 slips for checking, of which 560 were represented by cards in the N.C.L. depository set (including variant editions which we were prepared to alter), giving a proportion of 66½ per cent. Mr. Newcombe warned me that we would have to do some temporary cataloguing while waiting for the cards to arrive from America, as this would always be a matter of weeks, if not months in some cases. I realized that difficulty, but small public libraries like Canterbury cannot afford to purchase much current non-fiction, and by the time we could afford it, the L.C. cards would probably be ready.

The problem really fell into two parts. First, was the percentage of stock for which cards were available sufficiently high to warrant adopting them as the base of our new dictionary catalogue? Secondly, when our stock was catalogued, would the time-lag between ordering and receipt of cards, and the temporary cataloguing involved, justify continuing their use? I visited the National Central Library Bureau of American Bibliography and secured some valuable information from Miss Taylor, the Librarian-in-charge.

During these deliberations, my Committee had agreed to spend £125 on the new catalogue. There was no provision in the estimates, as these were framed before I took over, but fortunately there was a Slater Bequest Fund in existence, which came to the rescue.

With some misgivings, and heartened by the pessimistic warnings of

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librarians, I despatched my first order to America on July 3rd last year. To save time I used the slips from the duplicate MS. author catalogue as order slips. I received the cards in return on 22nd August.

The first batch contained slips for 633 books, and printed cards were sent for 490 of these—77 per cent.; 11 per cent. were held owing to the cards not being ready immediately. Only 12 per cent. were returned without printed cards being available. This was most encouraging, and I decided to accept any variation whatsoever, in order to get as many printed cards as possible.

Unfortunately, the outbreak of war caused some delay, as our staff was temporarily reduced in the cause of civil defence; the consequence is that so far only 1,737 order slips have gone over to America. 6,968 printed cards have arrived for 1,323 books (76 per cent. of total ordered), cards for 156 books are to follow when available, and 250 books (15 per cent.) will have to be catalogued here.

Since the war I have noticed no delay in despatching our cards and the usual period from ordering to receipt averages about six weeks.

As far as temporary cataloguing of new additions is concerned, we catalogue on thin paper slips of standard size, using two carbons. The first slip is the temporary author slip for the catalogue, the second is for the accession register, and the third goes in the L.C. order file, awaiting despatch to America. On its return this order slip goes into the classified file of additions. I am perfectly satisfied with the number of L.C. cards so far to hand, and prefer to leave the decision as to continuing their use for new additions until our catalogue is complete.

From my experience in using these cards, I can honestly say that the L.C. standard of cataloguing is quite as high as the best public library practice in Great Britain: thus even the medium-sized and smaller libraries can possess a catalogue ranking in technical efficiency with the best in the country. The cards are worth purchasing if only for the extremely good subject headings. Another important gain is that the Library of Congress cards give the correct entry for the author's name; thus the receipt of one or more author cards ensures a correct catalogue entry.

The cost compares most favourably with individual libraries doing their own cataloguing. We have had one account so far for cards sent July–December 1939:—3,128 printed cards for 926 volumes at a cost of \$110 (£26 approximately), including postage. I doubt whether any library in the country could type those 3,000 odd cards for anything like £26. It is not merely a question of typing, however; each volume has to be catalogued and subject headings decided upon. Centralized classification is also made possible. The Library of Congress estimate

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that classification costs them about 1s. per volume. This is work which takes up a great deal of time in English libraries, if it is to be done at all well. The provision of Library of Congress cards eliminates this work and its corresponding expense.

I asked the Library of Congress if any other British library were issuing their cards and they replied:

"There is a depository set of the L.C. printed cards in the National Central Library, London. In addition to this set our records indicate that we are sending cards to the two libraries and the book dealer listed below:

Institute of Historical Research, London.

(All cards relating to American and British history.)

Nuneaton Public Library, Nuneaton.

(Cards by and about George Eliot.)

Arthur F. Bird, Book Dealer, London.

(All cards relating to Brazil.)"

The experiment at Canterbury has established one fact at least, that a library recataloguing its stock could employ L.C. printed cards with great advantage and considerable economy in time and effort. A classified catalogue would not cost as much for printed cards as a dictionary catalogue, in view of the fact that the added entries of a dictionary catalogue would be replaced by the index entries on blank cards of the classified catalogue.

One of the most interesting facts about the L.C. cards is that 65 per cent. of the cards we get require no alteration whatsoever. They are correct as to date, editor, translator, publisher, etc. I have been surprised to receive printed cards for local privately printed books, and strangest of all, for a Penguin book. The Library of Congress must receive a large number of English published books, judging by the cards, whilst a considerable number are from catalogue copy supplied by outlying university and public libraries in America.

The articles in the March *Library world* by Mr. Jast and Mr. Berwick Sayers have raised once more the question of centralized cataloguing. There is no valid reason why a scheme should not be put into operation now. All the objections that may be raised were faced and overcome in America forty years ago, and the 6,000 American libraries using printed cards show how successful the American scheme has been.

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Valuations

S. H. Horrocks

IN the last Valuations attention was called to the setting-up, by *Westminster*, of a special Fine Arts Library housing in one sequence the lending and reference stocks of the library system. Mr. Butchart has written to expose my ignorance. *Edinburgh*, he says, set up a special Fine Arts Library in the Central Library, George IV Bridge, in January 1936. Not to have known, or rather remembered, this fact is an inexcusable error. Mr. Butchart goes on to say that the department now contains 11,323 books, 3,171 prints, and 8,167 art illustrations for home issue. The book-cases for the stock were specially designed by the librarian, a feature of them being the use of screens covered with beaver-board upon which can be exhibited selections from the print collections. This formidable collection exceeds numerically Westminster's library, which consists of about 7,000 volumes and 10,000 prints, many of the latter being London items. A personal visit to the latter library, however, convinced me of the quality of the stock: a check-up on Leonardo Da Vinci revealed all the standard works, including the recent Richter edition of his literary works (but not the 1880 edition), the new two-volume note-books (but not the old single-volume MacCurdy), Muntz, Taylor, Siren, Thiis, and Rosenberg; a similar check was made on Van Gogh with a like result. The classification is a special one, private to Westminster, using Dewey's notation but with a considerably altered schedule. Statistics reveal that during the year April 1939 to March 1940 the room was visited by 2,495 readers, the total books used being 8,024, of which 1,965 were issued for home reading. The latter seems a very low figure when it is realized that the daily average is only nine. The library was closed for three months at the beginning of the war.

* * *

Two annual reports have come in from South Africa. *Johannesburg's* is an interesting one, a diamond among reports. Opulent and convincing, it contains the following paragraph:

"In a big lending library such as the Central, for which almost all general books of value are purchased, it appears that the stock is less attractive than in a small branch library, where the more popular books are less diluted by numerous volumes of a less wide appeal. This has been the case in the Central Library, where the proportion of more readable books such as *Inside Europe*, *Insanity fair*, *My years in Germany*, and *The Healing knife* has been very low."

This is worth digesting. Apart from the book titles, which show South Africa's preoccupation with European politics, the paragraph

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epitomizes well a tendency which has only shown itself widely in England in the last decade. This is the relegation to the stack (or reserve stock) of those books with but a small, and that a specialized, issue value. In the stack they are useful without being dead weight: they do not clutter up the shelves; they leave the library looking better; and they are there for service when wanted. The student who wants them will, if he is worth his salt, surely ask for them, and the books are not likely to be on issue to an arbitrary reader when he wishes to consult them. There is also a good deal to be said for putting into the stack a duplicate copy of each of the classics so that when asked for, say, *Paradise lost*, a library will almost always be able to supply a copy.

The Johannesburg service has as many facets as a well-cut diamond; sufficient merely to catalogue the details: 222,608 books in stock, 1,090,719 issues, two branches (one of them with a fine shop window display), an attractive-looking travelling library, a hospital library service, a municipal reference library. The travelling library has thirty-nine stops; it remains three-quarters of an hour at each and sometimes issues as many as 300 books at a time! The *Port Elizabeth* ninety-first report remarks that "it is not sufficiently widely known that the Public Libraries of South Africa have been built up almost entirely by subscriptions from Members." This city, unlike Johannesburg, just mentioned, has not municipalized its public library and consequently is alarmed, as well it might be, at the opening of another 3d. library in the city. The subscribers pay £2,008 towards the total income of £5,000, the city pays £1,000, and the Government £360. The stock of books has topped the 69,000 mark, but the issue is at the low figure of 134,579.

* * *

The brightest thing about *Rochester's* library service is that it is improving. But, goodness knows, it has still a long way to go, and Mr. Winkle's horse, one feels, would not now trot back to Rochester with such alacrity were the library the city's only attraction. Our old boggy, the inadequate book allowance, spread its usual ruinous disease; the reference library has only four seats; and the librarian, four assistants, and one part-time caretaker are fed and clothed on £427. The total cost of the library service per inhabitant for the year was less than the cost of a small packet of cigarettes!

* * *

In *Bedford, Blyth*, and *Colchester* the three hundreds are booming. Political and social questions, and modern history, are being read and studied as never before. Colchester and Blyth record congestion, the former describing conditions in the peak hours as "deplorable." Their new library was taken over at the beginning of the war for Police and Food

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Control, a disastrous step from the library's point of view, as the year's efforts had been bent towards preparing for a removal to the new premises in the autumn. Issues have reached 323,477, and with tickets in force for one year they have 12.8 per cent. of borrowers to total population. Blyth, on the other hand, has 23.7 per cent. of borrowers, with issues at 217,105 (population 34,470). The removal of all magazines into the Reference Library has "tended to introduce more readers to the reference shelves." What kind of readers, one may ask? Readers of periodicals, comes the reply: and the reflection of the observant librarian is a dubious one. Will the introduction of this kind of reader disturb reference library work? It does, in fact, disturb the work; it can interrupt it, and finally stifle it; and although local conditions in Blyth may have made the step imperative, the move is surely not one to be copied.

Bedford's analysis of issues is a detailed one; interesting, too. To begin with, the librarian is not dismayed at a fiction issue of over 83 per cent., a figure which would resemble the Slough of Despond to many a librarian, but which Bedford, unlike Christian, rides with ease, remarking that the quality of fiction that is read is good, and supplementing the remark by giving a list of last year's best sellers, ranging in importance from Dornford Yates to Somerset Maugham; they are all there except *The Citadel* and *Gone with the wind*. Bedford's most notable acquisition to stock was the John Bunyan Library, presented to the town by Dr. Harrison. Issues at 379,221 and a book fund of £1,296 are up to the average.

* * *

Five book lists, dated March, chosen at random, show a remarkable discrepancy in book selection. A comparison of the books on these lists is not, perhaps, of very great value, the lists being issued at different times of the month. Also, many libraries have delay in the purchase of books owing to committee processes, etc., but it is still curious that there is not a single book (so far as I can see) which appears in all the lists, and there are, in fact, but few which are duplicated. Three of the lists (Eastbourne, Ealing, and Rugby) include Sayer's *Begin here*; two of them (Eastbourne, Ealing) R. S. Lambert's *Ariel and all his quality*, a book which is surely of wide enough interest to figure on all the lists. This same comment could also be applied to Haldane's *Keeping cool*, Villard's *Inside Germany*, Wiskemann's *Undeclared war*, Raymond Gram Swing's *How war came*, and Skilling and Richardson's *Astronomy*. A catalogue of further books of a similar type would be needless repetition. Eastbourne's neat two-page list in Gill contains most of the books given above, but could surely have had its topical value increased by omitting such older and well-known books as Black's *King's nurse-beggar's nurse*, 92

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Jacks and Whyte's *Rape of the earth*, and C. W. Mumford's *The Culture of cities*. There is a gap in the book selection of a library which has only just added these to stock. *Blyth* and *Luton* can also be similarly criticized, although the latter has, perhaps, compensating qualities. *Luton's Books*, March 1940, has on its front cover a pleasant portrait of Stella Gibbons, who is the subject of an informed essay prefacing the book list. The books on the latter show evidence of careful selection, with one or two good annotations: though I think the compiler has studiously avoided the inclusion of the very well known books; with some idea, perhaps, of publicizing the lesser-known but important ones. The principle is, to say the least, a debatable one, especially as some of the books are not really "new books of the month." The listing of Henry Williamson's *Children of Shallowford* under Hugh Williamson is an error, too. *Ealing's* little hand-list stands up to all the tests remarkably well and is attractive in the bargain. *Rugby's* New Books lists only fourteen new books, the rest of the pamphlet being distinguished by an annotation under Hamilton's *Road through Kurdistan* (given amongst a selection of the books of the last two years) calling attention, with unconscious humour, to "the remarkable lack of conveniences from Iraq to the Caspian Sea."

Fulham, in place of their familiar monthly publication, now issue from time to time an occasional list of new books, as neatly produced as one would expect, with a good commercial set of books. *Southport's* Quarterly Bulletin begins with a list of books on psychology and psychoanalysis, which latter, with a nice imagination, jostles Freud with Megroz' *Dream world*. Coleridge, at a pinch, could have been included, and the whole prefaced by his famous definition of imagination as "the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities." *Audenshaw* send along a duplicated brochure with a front cover printed by hand in two colours from lino cuts done by a member of the staff—an original effort worth commendation.

* * *

The titanic figure of Mr. Middleton bestrides the dig-for-victory lists. *Ealing* and *Bristol* go two spits deep, *Rochester* only one. *Ealing's* "A Garden goes to war" is by far the most attractive I have so far seen on the subject. The letterpress is grass-green on primrose-yellow, the list of books being very exhaustive, perhaps exhaustingly so, despite the many and charming line blocks. The list ends on a harmonious and fitting note—the Pied Piper piping out the weeds! *Bristol's* list, called "Grow more food," is frankly selective, and is all the better for that. Provided the selected list is an evaluative one, and not just a pin-prick arbitrary compilation, how much better is it to suggest than to weary?

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Conversely, Rochester's selection of books on gardening ought not to have been pruned so severely. It lacks Coult's *Complete book of gardening*, Wright's *Encyclopædia*, and all Macself's better books. It is important, Rochester, that we dig for victory and not scratch for it.

Two more of Bristol's grand duplicated lists cover cookery and religion. Few of the cookery lists which are issued give dietetics its due prominence; Bristol, even, put their selection at the end, where it is likely to be missed, instead of at the beginning. It is also important, as I said above, that the select list should contain the elect, and this selection on dietetics omits that classic, Hutchison and Mottram's *Food and the principles of dietetics*.

Call number from an American list: 9331.8373A23 = 8122.02 — 111.

N.B.—Will libraries kindly send all matter for this article to me at The Public Library, Porchester Road, London, W.2.

Divisional Activities

THERE have always been two schools of thought among those who arrange and attend professional meetings. There is the school which prefers papers which are practical, which will assist in the more expeditious working of a library, and there is that school which desires to get away from the details of everyday routine and prefers to discuss the abstract ideas behind various aspects of librarianship or some literary, social, or educational topic which has some bearing on our profession. Examples of both attitudes may be found in the latest Divisional Reports.

The Annual General Meeting of the Yorkshire Division which was held on 29th February is a perfect example of the practical kind of meeting. It was a business meeting with the pleasant addition of the presentation to Mr. Proctor, the retiring treasurer, already mentioned in the ASSISTANT; but the main interest was the inspection of the Percival Leigh Library, Crossgates, and Mr. Gordon's introductory talk on the planning and building of this branch. The Greater London Division's Joint Meeting with the London and Home Counties Branch held on 27th March was also concerned with the extremely practical matter of staff training and conditions, the paper being read by Mr. Munford of Dover.

The meeting of the South Wales Division on 13th February is an example of the second type. Mr. J. S. Richards, B.A., spoke on "Some aspects of psychology and librarianship," or, as he rephrased it in his opening sentences, "Psychology and the way it may affect librarians." He pointed out that while a knowledge of psychology, that science which

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explains why people do what they do, may be helpful to the librarian, it must not be regarded as a panacea for all ills. Speaking as a reader Mr. Richards paid tribute to the extent of the material provided by our public libraries. He dealt with the psychology of the reader and the psychology of instincts, and among other topics with the questions of "escapist" literature, the definitely misleading non-fiction work, and the right or otherwise of the librarian deliberately to seek to "uplift" his public. His conclusion was a plea that the heritage of our best imaginative literature should be made accessible to all.

"Libraries in war-time" is a topic which continues to appear in divisional programmes. Mr. H. Joliffe, the Chairman of the East Midland Division, spoke on this at the General Meeting of the Division on 25th January at Beeston. He dealt with the measures taken to cope with the changes brought by war to libraries, with what still remained to be done, and what could be expected in the future. This meeting, however, catered for all tastes. Mr. Joliffe's paper was not the only one. Mr. Ling's paper on "The Illustration of children's books" which appeared in the last number of the ASSISTANT was given on this occasion also. The Nottingham assistants held a debate in the Central Library on 14th March on "Should library assistants specialize?" The voting was "agin it."

The meeting of the Kent sub-branch at Canterbury on 6th March, while dealing with this same topic of "Libraries in war-time," was not concerned with details of routine adjustment but with the interpretation of the library's function during war-time. By the examination of current practice in book-selection Mr. Birch of Folkestone attempted to prove that the librarian has always unconsciously aimed at the education of the community in critical awareness, but this was due to our liberal tradition of freedom and not intrinsically the library function. Mr. Southall of Maidstone held, however, that this very education in critical awareness was the intrinsic function of the public library. He maintained that the full development of such awareness was inimical to the present organization of society and libraries really belonged to a future order of society. In time of war it was, of course, even more important than in time of peace that the libraries should pursue the policy of supporting freedom and progress materially and spiritually. Mr. Mainwood of Deal also considered that the library was concerned with the development of free intelligent people, but he presumably decided that the meeting had had enough of abstractions. Among his practical suggestions was a scheme whereby the information from periodical literature should be made easily available to people in a given area by the co-operation of the various libraries in that area. The resulting discussion showed that

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Kentish assistants can be fluent on such topics as communism, education, censorship, as well as on the position of the public library in war-time.

E. M. E.



Current Books: Art and Architecture

HARRY BATSFORD and CHARLES FRY. *The Greater English church of the Middle Ages*. Batsford. 7s. 6d.

ANOTHER good picture book from Batsford's. Abbeys, churches, and cathedrals are described together, and the volume is in fact an informal but comprehensive guide to England's ecclesiastical architecture. The two colour-plates—one of a thirteenth-century wall painting—are delicately reproduced; the half-tone illustrations are mostly of important details—such as the fourteenth-century girders at Wells—or of unexpected aspects.

The Paintings of Michelangelo. Allen and Unwin. 10s. 6d.

In this, the latest addition to the Phaidon series, the English printers have kept up the standard attained by their Viennese predecessors. Many of the 180 illustrations are devoted to full-page details of the larger works, and a magnificent impression can be obtained of many paintings whose originals can only be viewed properly from a horizontal position. The two large folding plates are of the Sistine Chapel; it is to be regretted that not a single colour-plate has been included.

CLARE TURLAY NEWBERRY. *Drawing a cat*. Studio. 2s. 6d.

Clare Newberry could have given this book a more inclusive title, for, although her brief remarks are restricted to cats, most of her hints and the interesting details of her technique are applicable to the portraiture of domestic animals in general. Some of the illustrations from the charming children's story *Mittens* are included, and the great variety of cats in all kinds of poses are excellently reproduced.

TOULOUSE-LAUTREC. Hyperion Press. 12s. 6d.

There is little available in print on Toulouse-Lautrec, and although the colour reproductions in the present volume are by no means up to the standard of the eight fine Lautrec plates published by Skira, this edition will be of greater use to the general public. Most of Lautrec's paintings are here reproduced in monotone and form a useful catalogue raisonné, while the colour-plates are of unusual works but not perhaps

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of his best. This edition is uniform with the others on Daumier, Gauguin, etc., which were taken over by the Hyperion Press recently.

J. M. RICHARDS. *An Introduction to modern architecture*. Penguin Books. 6d.

Modern architecture from the point of view of the ordinary man is the subject of this book; the numerous and convincing illustrations help to make it worth considerably more than sixpence. The author is a modernist but no revolutionary, and his book amply fulfils its purpose of giving enlightenment and helping appreciation.

ARNOLD WHITTICK. *Eric Mendelsohn*. Faber. 25s.

A monograph on the work of the distinguished German architect, now exiled from his country. Mendelsohn was a pioneer of the steel and glass age: his modernism, however, has not the ruthlessness of Corbusier, but is tinged with a romantic feeling. In his later works in Palestine he seems to have reached a mature and individual style. An important book, beautifully illustrated and produced.

R. H. WILENSKI. *Modern French painters*. Faber. 30s.

Not everybody will agree with Wilenski's views on art, but here is a monograph which is both authoritative and comprehensive. Starting with the *Salon des Refusés* of 1863 Wilenski devotes a chapter to each decade: criticism, lives, and catalogues of the works of the masters are clearly distinguished. The ninety-six half-tone illustrations are well-chosen and the production in general is beyond reproach. Invaluable, too, is the running commentary on the artistic life of France which gives the necessary background to the artists' works.

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT. *An Organic architecture*. Lund Humphries. 7s. 6d.

The author, probably the outstanding architect of our time, delivered these lectures in London last year. They are idealistic, witty, original, and full of a democratic spirit; they put modernism in its proper place and substitute an architecture which is functional yet romantic, springing from the earth, yet part of it. Not the least valuable part of the book is the stimulating discussion which followed each lecture. Production and illustrations are magnificent.

R. L. W. C.
W. B. S.

The Library Assistant Students' Problems

D. H. Halliday

THE *Elementary Examination*. Mr. E. V. Corbett (Mitcham) continues the discussion on the Elementary section, and incidentally gives some useful advice for intending candidates.

He writes: "It is difficult to add to the sound advice already given by Mr. Paton, but my own experience does differ from his in some respects, whilst there are also certain points worth mentioning in connection with the Library Administration and Classification and Cataloguing papers.

"In the first place, no doubt Mr. Paton has good authority for stating that the percentage of failures in literature is higher than that in the other papers, but I have found that many students who write fairly good answers to literature questions are by no means so good in the technical subjects. This can usually be attributed to too much theory and too little practical experience. Text-book reading unsupported by actual working knowledge of library administration is of doubtful value, and the student's ignorance is often revealed through a lack of understanding of the knowledge acquired by text-book reading alone. Students who cannot fully grasp the meaning or purpose of any section of the syllabus should have no hesitation in seeking the help of a senior assistant in elucidating the problem and should enquire into every routine process performed in their library.

"Again, beware of the seemingly easy question. Remember a higher standard is expected in answering such questions than in those where original thought and ideas are asked for. This type of question should be answered in a systematic manner, each process given its separate paragraph, all of which together should form a complete whole. A sufficiency of detail is also necessary. Such questions are also much improved by diagrams or examples to elucidate points difficult to explain in words.

"A special difficulty in classification seems to occur in differentiating between the linguistic and country numbers of Dewey. The former are used in classes 400 and 800, whilst the latter are entirely different, being obtained from the divisions 940-999. If a question asking for a number of definitions figures in the examination paper, answer it, as it is a sure way of obtaining maximum marks on one question at any rate. Give standard definitions only and do not try to make up your own—this is one instance in which quotations from text-books are to be commended. In answering questions requiring original thought assemble all your knowledge in logical order and do not hesitate to express your own views on the soundness or otherwise of some particular routine method—

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originality of thought is a thing to be encouraged, although, unfortunately, it is somewhat rare in professional examinations.

"Finally, a word about English literature. Give a quotation from the author's original work when this will demonstrate some particular feature of the author's style. For revision of general literature *An Outline of English literature*, 1930, by William H. Hudson, is an excellent book.

"With regard to modern literature *Main currents in modern literature*, 1935, by A. R. Reade, is to be recommended, and this reading should be brought up to date by reference to the section on literature in the last few issues of *The Annual register* and by reading the book reviews in the current numbers of *The Times literary supplement*."

Classification candidates please note. To come across titles already known in the practical paper is by no means the "gift" that so many candidates regard it. Only in so far as the possible placings have been reviewed can an advantage be found, and this is often offset by a careless assurance which leads candidates to take for granted that the place allotted to the book in their own library is correct. This may be mistaken because in the examination the placings must be arrived at from the annotations provided—which do not necessarily reflect the exact subject-matter of the books themselves, but are framed specially to provide a test for the candidate in weighing subject interest and applying the scheme. Consequently, should a particular title be recognized, it would be most unwise to be influenced by a preconceived idea of the book or by its placing in a particular library.

Few libraries, if any, follow the *Decimal Classification* slavishly. Modifications, based either on local needs or practice established when using early editions of the scheme, are abundant, particularly in older libraries. The candidate must be particularly careful to disregard such modifications and conform instead to the practice laid down in Dewey. Under the present conditions of the examination it is possible to lose many marks through accepting local practice as a model.

Have all candidates examined, and read reviews of, the new edition of the *Subject Classification*? One of the best reviews was that by Dr. Walford which appeared in the September 1939 *LIBRARY ASSISTANT* (p. 209). It should repay careful study.

To all candidates. The best advice I can offer to intending candidates is to study the examiners' reports published in a new form in the March and August 1939 numbers of the *Library Association record* (pp. 109 and 408). An hour spent examining the appropriate reports in conjunction with the examination papers may make all the difference between pass and failure.

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